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A thing to hold: The visual language of the book form

Abstract

This article considers the book form itself as an ornamental object. The binding, paper and ink appeal to the senses and all add to experience of the reader. The future is a place of e-books, online publications and Instagram posts, and yet this arguably makes the carefully considered design of the book form even more important in the physical books that we do choose to view. The study examines a series of examples, drawing from artists' books, pop-up books and mainstream publishing. The work draws strongly on the collection of pop-up books at the National Library of Scotland and the artists' book collection at Edinburgh College of Art, looking at both historical and contemporary works. Initially exploring how the form of the book itself can visually communicate a narrative, the study goes on to reflect on the emotion associated with opening a pop-up book, as if in the presence of a theatrical production, made more extreme by the embellishments employed. The place of the book form within a digital world is considered and, finally, the emergence of decorative books in the form of colouring books related to mindfulness.

Introduction

The past is a rich narrative of books that are beautiful and ornamental artefacts. Illuminated manuscripts, fine bindings and a historical look at pop-up books take you along a path of sculpturally embellished books. Artists' books, art books and sculptural book works continue the story. Form is also an important consideration within mainstream publishing. Comics, picture books and high-end editions such as works by The Folio Society all communicate a great deal of their narrative through their selected form.

This is a broad topic with the potential to consider a full history of the book form, and it is helpful to consider definitions of different categories of book form as a starting point. However, the reality is that we do not have fixed definitions for many of these terms; instead we have contextual understandings, and the history of the book has already been well documented. Instead this article reflects on the *visual language* of the book form: how does a book communicate a narrative through the form itself. This subject has been explored more thoroughly within the discipline of Art; however, within the field of Design there is scope for a re-examination.

This article first considers *how* a book can visually communicate through form, arguing that some expression comes through the theatricality of the medium. A reflection on this information in relation to a digital twenty-first century examines the digital mediation of the physical book and what it means for a book to exist in this forum. Finally returning to the physical form, audience participation in the performance or theatre of the book is considered relative to a recent decorative collection of colouring books for adults.

The book form as narrative

Take a moment to picture an artists' book, zine,¹ pop-up book or any other decorative manuscript and think about the experience of holding it in your hand – the weight, the smell, the anticipation. You then open it up and the first page is revealed and yet any book designer can use these things to play and manipulate the reader, requiring them to turn it over in their hands, change direction, perhaps create a secret page. The designer does

¹ According to Todd and Watson zines are best described as 'cheaply made printed forms of expression on any subject. They are like mini magazines or home made comic books'. They go on to comment that zines may be collaborative, the audience is extremely wide and have been known historically by other names such as chap- books and pamphlets, existing anywhere people have a desire to spread a message, 'People with independent ideas have been getting their word out since there were printing presses'(Todd and Watson 2006: n.pag.).

not have any ultimate control over how their reader actually *reads* the book though. Consider the speed and direction. It is not like a film or animation, where the pace and order are fixed. The book designer can suggest and guide, but no more. From another viewpoint, the book is a physical object and as such exists in space, an artefact or sculpture. Yet a sculpture is static, whereas a book is not. A book is full of potential when you are on the outside looking in.

Sarah Bodman, Senior Research Fellow for Artists' Books at the Centre for Fine Print Research, reiterates this idea in her description of an artist's book and definition of sorts,

Successful artists' books utilize the whole design and production process to reinforce the message of the subject matter. Shapes, folds, text patterns and materials can be used to nudge the viewer in the direction of the artist's message, producing a unified coherent statement from the outset.

(Bodman 2005: 8)

What Bodman describes is in effect the concept that *form follows function*. Each detail is given attention and questioned, whether this is the intention of the designer or not. The *form*, when taken to include the materials used, processes undertaken, tactile qualities and everything else that makes up physical condition, conveys a collaborative message. When decisions made in each of these areas are sensitive to the content, then the narrative is supported. When a decision results in an element not in line with the message being communicated – or *function* – then it is a distraction or a miscommunication. Nothing is ornamental, when this is taken to mean *without purpose*, despite potentially still being visually attractive. Designers can use aesthetic features playfully together to make a coherent statement, or in other cases choose to disrupt or distract the reader with an element. In either case it is not incidental.

A question at the heart of all creative publishing practice is the challenge *what is a book?* This is an appropriate yet large question. Mario Fusco offers a useful starting point in attempting a definition: 'A book is an umbrella form for all sorts of otherwise unrelated material' (Fusco and Miller 2004: 154). This broad definition is useful as the subject, content, physical form and even materials may all differ, and yet this family of objects shares similarities as a collection of pages bound in some way together, either physically or conceptually. There is a multiple involved, sometimes in that an edition is made, or in other cases the pages themselves are the multiple.

In the introduction to the book *The Looking Book: A Pocket History of Circle Press*, which is incidentally a beautiful artists' book itself, George Szirtes suggests:

A book, in short, is something you can play with. Ron King and Circle Press have been making books and things that look like books for thirty years now [...]. King has taken books apart, reassembled them, got pages to pop-up, turned them into puppet theatres or towers or folding screens. He has taken monumental texts like Chaucer's 'Prologue', 'Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra' and 'The Song of Solomon' and invented visual languages for them based on mask, ritual and transformation.

(Courtney et al. 1996: n.pag.)

The book form is a particularly clever device. Szirtes makes comment on its versatility, both in format and in subject matter. There are literally no limits. Yet bindings and forms do not have to be complex to act as visual language; a concertina or accordion form is an excellent example of this. Using a single sheet and only folds, no glue or stitching, a meandering journey can be described. The poet John Burnside and book artist David Faithfull used this form to create their collaborative publication *Jura*. Burnside and Faithfull both responded to the small Scottish island, taking words, sounds and elements from the landscape. Faithfull gathered oak galls from the island, ground it down and made oak gall ink from the pigment, quite literally creating a drawing material from the location and using it to recreate the landscape in the form of a meandering panorama (Figure 1). The result is rugged and slightly messy, but full of life. Both text and drawings contain lots of movement, almost creating the breeze on the readers' cheek.

Figure 1: John Burnside and David Faithfull, *Jura*, 2008. Digital print. Photography courtesy of Lucy Roscoe. Courtesy of David Faithfull.

The book form as fabric

In my teaching practice, the fact that a simple book or zine form can be made from a single sheet of paper opens up a tremendous variety of project possibilities. When Illustration students are designing work intended to be printed within a book form or using sequences of images, it is important that they learn how to use a page turn, engage rhythm and construct a variety of compositions to deliver movement. Exploring a book form playfully is an ideal way to develop this practice. Once made, students are very keen to do something with these small publications, send them out into the world usually by selling them. A recent rise in creative publishing is echoed by a rediscovery of risograph. This cheap and quick process is popular with students for its look and feel. It has a quirky quality in contrast to other print processes, in that it never completely dries, a powdery residue remains and can often be found transferred onto a reader's finger tips. There is a nice resonance that a book can leave a mark on the reader, in this case a literal one.

In my own practice, I used this process to produce a zine about parkour. The book or zine is a risograph print, popping and restless in action, quick and playful to produce, reflecting the subject matter (Figure 2). As this work was experimental and made in response to student examples, I placed restrictions such as selecting a cheap sugar paper and only using two layers, confining that students can be faced with. Reflecting on the result is interesting; a more expensive paper would not only have held the ink differently but felt different in the reader's hand. The zine does not offer a sense of preciousness; instead it inhabits an ephemeral or a temporary space, reinforced as the pigment rubs off on the reader's hand.

This is also an example of a book made from a single sheet of paper – no glue, printed on one side. This simple book form has been prominent in the explosion in zine culture of recent years, which is perhaps a reaction to the mainstream and the digital. Teal Triggs, Professor of Graphic Design at the RCA, offers an explanation for the rise in attention in this field,

As a reader – there is something appealing about being able to have contact through the act of receiving a zine from a producer directly; the conversation that ensues, and the personal connection through a shared subject interest. Also, of course, the tactility of print is not to be underestimated. 'You can delve into subjects which perhaps flirt at the edges of radical or extreme content without censorship. It's a "free" space'.

(Gander 2016: n.pag.)

Roscoe, Parkour, 2018. Risograph print on sugar paper. Courtesy of Lucy Roscoe.

Permission is important here; the lack of an editorial board offers freedom to the designer. However, Triggs is clear that physicality is important in the popularity of the field, as is the connection with the maker themselves. In few other Art and Design areas are the opportunities to meet the maker so prevalent.

To read a book is a sensory experience – it has weight in your hands, a density. Every book has a smell, usually a combination of the ink and the paper, and yet also something picked up from the place it has been stored. The ink, paper and binding are the physical embodiment of the book. Liz Farrelly proposes, 'Of all the variables in the design of a book, magazine, catalogue or brochure, the choice of binding is a strong contender for the title of most fundamental – as the constructional backbone of the object and as a potentially expressive element' (1993: n.pag.). There is a practicality to the binding – to hold the pages together, and yet the decisions made around this function are integral to the narrative of the book. There is complete freedom within independent publishing, unlike mainstream publishing, where budget, availability of processing and technology all place constraints on choices. Yet Farrelly points out that restrictions do not always work against creativity, 'The binding of printed objects offers countless opportunities. Inspiration and ideas come from traditional book publication, artists' books and research into high-tech materials'. What Farrelly describes is a meeting point between art practice and functional design, a point where they might learn from one another.

The attention to detail in a craft maker is strongly illustrated in William Morris' Kelmscott Press. All of the 53 books produced by the press were constructed from the same paper, produced by the family firm of Batchelor and Sons. In his book *Paper: An Elegy*, Ian Sansom recounts the tale, 'On his first trip to meet Mr Batchelor and his sons, on 22 October 1890, Morris took with him a fifteenth-century Italian book [...] to show them the kind of paper he was looking for' (Sansom 2012: 53). Morris wanted a handmade paper for the sake of durability and appearance. He was against false economy. Ironically, Sansom reflects,

Scholars have estimated that the paper produced by Mr Batchelor and his sons cost Morris five or six times as much as machine-made paper of similar quality, a cost which when passed down to his own customers rather precluded the poor working men from actually buying Morris's books. But that wasn't the point. The books weren't merely printed on paper: they were *made* of paper.

(2012: 53, original emphasis)

Paper is the skeleton of the book, everything else is built upon this. In a contemporary example, Nobrow Press presents an interesting example in their Nobrow Small Press. The most familiar examples are the concertina books made as part of the Leporello series. There is a drama, depth and explosive content in each of these very particular designs. Colour is vivid and worlds are created. This kind of publishing is a luxury to the maker and the reader. The content must explore and exploit the concertina form, in the way that a standard publication format cannot. As with Morris' work there are consequences in production cost in order to produce and print a book of this kind; however, margins are not the primary consideration here, where playful and meaningful design are at the forefront.

The book form as theatre

I am particularly interested in the relationship between two and three dimensions when it comes to paper and books. The idea that a book can be hidden and stored neatly on a shelf, amongst a beautiful row of spines, then when you slide it out the surprising three-dimensional world revealed inside is magical. Ian Scott, curator at the National Library of Scotland (NLS), agrees,

Books by their nature are largely flat and 2D so pop-up books [...] are a fun way to showcase our collections and explore what books are. Opening up what seems an ordinary book only to have an elaborate reindeer and sleigh literally fly out at you captures the magic and fun of the pop-up.

(2018: n.pag.)

As Scott explains, books have the potential to surprise and transport the reader somewhere quite different. There is also an intimacy to the act of reading or viewing a book. In introducing a historical review of artists' books, Holland Cotter reflects that: 'Unlike paintings, or sculptures, or films, books are created for one-to-one interactions. They are, by nature, zones of privacy' (Drucker 2004: xii). We ask Visual Communication students to constantly consider the audience, analysing how data will be *read*, the hierarchy of the page and the take-away message. There is, however, a limit to this control. As Cotter explains, 'There is no way, short of censorship, for an outside observer to monitor or control the intimate encounters they offer and the education they provide'. Ultimately every one-to-one interaction will be different.

As research for a Paper Theatre project in 2018, I took undergraduate students to see the collection of pop-up books at the NLS. This kind of book has always been a real treat. Scott explained how the collection is used to trace history and inspire, 'We use them to explore the nature and potential of the book through the story of pop-ups from their origins as novelty books for children to innovative works such as the Circle Press book' (Scott 2018: n.pag.). A classic historical example shown was German illustrator Lothar Meggendorfer's 1887 book *International Circus* (Meggendorfer [1887] 1979). This is a large work and particularly theatrical due to its scale and the circus ring that is formed when the book is folded out and tiered seating revealed. Other examples tracing the development of pop-up books included excerpts in *Daily Express Children's Annuals* and examples produced by the publisher Bookano, both familiar household staples of their time.

Scott also proposes that another kind of pop-up book sits at the artists' book end of the scale. *Bluebeard's Castle* was produced by Circle Press, which takes the form of a series of abstract *sets* for the opera by Bartok.

Theatre and books cleverly come together in the work by Ronald King, as recounted by historian Cathy Courtney when describing the approach of the designer, 'With "Bluebeard's Castle" King took a more plastic approach to the book form and amalgamated his printing skills with his latent instincts as a builder of stage-sets' (Courtney et al. 1996: n.pag.). The imagery is rich and abstract. Courtney explains,

The work is also a good illustration of his desire to tell stories but not necessarily in a straight- forward way as, although the springboard for the book was Bartok's opera, the final piece bears little in relationship to anything in its libretto.

(Courtney et al. 1996: n.pag.)

This book is both dramatic and intimate. The original subject matter is not important by the end of the making process. Individual loose sections are screen printed and placed in a perfectly fitted card- board folio. Because of this design, it is impossible to flick through the work quickly; the viewer is slowed down, taking in each scene fully before moving on to the next.

In contrast *600 Black Spots* by David A. Carter is produced by the much larger publisher Tate (2009). Abstract pop-ups are deceptively simple, often utilizing a few block colours, emphasizing the mechanisms. There is excitement and a playfulness with how the designer carries the reader through each scene, manipulating the movement. In a third example, *Inspiration* by Ron Van der Meer (Tango Paper 2012), paper sculptures are created to interpret Chinese Proverbs. Each statement is bold, yet thought provoking, using shapes and movement to communicate each narrative. Pages work individually. The audience is challenged to consider how they are each made. Within each of these examples, fragility is implied, and yet the mechanisms themselves must remain durable and stand up to use. Within the function the books simply do not communicate.

Viewing a set of books that sat between self-publishing – dealing with artist's books, indie magazines and zines in particular – and the broader publishing industry that looks to a much wider audience was extremely helpful in establishing a connection between form and narrative. There are endless possibilities in the manipulation and production of books, and yet all begin with the same material starting point: paper. In a book dedicated to exploring the flexibility of this simple material, Richard Sweeney comments 'It is the tactile quality of paper that is so appealing – there are few materials capable of presenting such a diversity of form-making through manipulation solely by hand. This physical connection with material is perhaps the most important aspect' (Sloman 2009: 5). A material that can make toilet rolls and insulation amongst its many other talents can also present itself in so many forms available to bookbinders and designers. Each book is 1000 tiny decisions that will determine the nature and communication of the final article. Sweeney alludes to manipulation by hand being dominant in this craft; however, this is not to the dismissal of machinery.

Figure 3: Ronald King and Roy Fisher, Bluebeard's Castle, Circle Press, 1972. Digital print. Photography courtesy of Lucy Roscoe. Courtesy of Ronald King.

Figure 4: Lucy Roscoe, Frankenstein, 2018. Digital print and paper. Courtesy of Lucy Roscoe.

Figure 5: John Byrne giant pop-up book revealed, around 1973. Reinforced cardboard. Courtesy of V&A Dundee/Michael McGurk.

My own work in sculptural books has always woven between illustration and design, the craft of bookbinding and then also the world of artist's books. To make books is congruent, drawing from and joining with various disciplines. In 2018, Liverpool Book Art invited makers to produce work for an exhibition marking 200 years since the first publication of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*. The brief asked makers to consider this early science fiction book and gothic text. There are very dark themes in the text and dramatic landscapes and dangerous scenes. In the design I was interested in the carousel or star books in the NLS collection, drawn to the idea of exaggerating the idea of using theatrical sets. The result was a carousel book, presenting a series of scenes for the novel based on settings or locations. In this case the form was used as in a traditional theatre production, at each turn of the page the audience experiences a set change, transporting them to another location, yet also

communicating dramatic changes in the tone of the narrative. Although small, the *sets* can be moved and lit in different ways to create dramatic effects.

Possibly the most unusual pop-up book in the NLS collection is John Byrne's large pop-up book, which is designed as a functioning theatre set. Around 1973 the Scottish artist designed a pop-up set for *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*. Onstage the cast turned through the pages during the performance and incredibly the set was transported on the roof of a van. Up close you can see the wear and tear on this artefact made from paper, which although designed with a children's book form in mind, highlights economic exploitation from the Highland Clearances to the North Sea oil boom of the 1970s (V&A Dundee 2019: n.pag.) The layered folding parts of the pop-up book successfully form scenery much like the flat sections used in theatre sets.

The digital realm

If the physical form of the book is so related to the visual language of the book, how does this relate to a future of e-books, online publications and social media? Going back to that question of what is a book, what does it mean for something to exist as a book in a digital situation, where the object has no weight in your hands, the material is not tactile and the binding is data rather than glue or thread. If you remove these elements is it still a book? I do not have the answer to this question; however, Fusco's broad 'umbrella' definition of a book does leave space for a digital existence. Artists and designers have used digital methods to publish, disseminate and even to collate content so there is a practical discussion taking place. I struggle to separate what seem to be defining physical characteristics from the book form, yet it seems that the idea of a collection of pages is represented in the digital realm.

Paper remains the ghost in our machines [...] even when it's not there, when it has been shown to be unnecessary or not to exist, we continue to imagine it [...] [a word document has] the appearance of a sheet or white paper. In the corner of the screen sits an image of a waste-paper basket. There are margins. Paragraphs.

(2012: xvi)

Designers took and used the language of the book because that is what we had and understood. Workplaces encourage us to print only when necessary, and yet we still work on a *page*. Even the e-book retains the qualities of a book, 'e-books and their associated reading devices have come increasingly to resemble paper books in almost every regard: in their shape, size, feel and functionality [...] All we need is an e-book reader that actually *smells* like paper', Sansom retorts, and the likeness will be complete (2012: 51). In an interview with the marketing officer of an Italian paper company, journalist Deborah Burnstone discovered that they were reacting to the change in how the material they produce is used,

[I]t is possible that the physical, emotional, tactile and visual qualities of the books we do buy will become increasingly important [...]. Book artefacts will need to be more beautiful and appealing to the five senses. Books that are now printed on cheap paper, coated or woody stock will be natural candidates for being ebooks. All the rest will remain paper, and possibly improve.

(Burnstone 2012: n.pag)

The reading habits of the public appear to be changing in the way that the company predicted. When electronic reading devices first became popular from experience it was risky to mention them amongst book artists and bookbinders. It could provoke disgust and anger, a threat to the physical form, an intruder. Yet a few years later they appear to have found a place. As a reader I devour books quickly. Cost and space mean that it is not practical to keep a copy of every book. Increasingly I am aware it may not be environmentally friendly either. In an e-book, as with a paperback novel, the form is not inherent to the function or narrative. In this environment it would not be efficient to mass produce books with specialist bindings. There is an argument that by producing more books in a digital form where the function does not rely so much on the form, more space is created for the physical book form as an ornamental object and completes a sensory experience. There is a flaw in this argument though if you believe that a book is never truly separated from its form. Even in a paperback the cover is

designed to the brief. To judge a book by its cover is forgivable, if that cover accurately reflects and does justice to the material inside.

Where a book is originally created as a physical artefact, there will always be challenges in translating that into a digital form. Eleanore Widger from the University of Dundee is aware of these limitations and currently undertaking a research project at the Scottish Poetry Library that looks differently at the relationship between the book form and digital representation (Widger 2019: n. pag.) There are archives and catalogues that document the existence and appearance of interesting book forms, such as artists' books. To archive though is to document rather than reproduce and Widger is looking at a range of ways that consider further the experience of the reader viewing the book themselves. She reflects that when you release yourself from the obligation of replicating the original book, things can get interesting. Her work currently involves a range of formats and platforms, particular to different books. An example is making a film of a book being viewed – however, in this case there remains Widger's own hands between the viewer and the object. In another example she uses an online platform to communicate the page turns using a sliding image; this is more successful at replicating the page transition (Figure 5). However, Widger reflects that failing to capture everything is not necessarily a bad thing as it directs viewers back to the original work. In each of Widger's examples there is a performance element to the presentation, which relates back to the theatrical dimension of the physical book form discussed above.

In my own practice I was surprised by the relationship between the physical and digital form in a project undertaken as part of the 100 days Project Scotland. Each year creative practitioners are invited to repeat a creative activity each day for 100 days and publish the output online. At the end of the project an exhibition is held. In 2018 the illustrations that I created around the broad subject of *home* took various forms, sometimes two-dimensional images and at other times three-dimensional sculptures. It was interesting to see which presented themselves most successfully on the Instagram platform that I used to publish the work. When the time came to collate 100 pieces of work into a physical form for exhibition the individual artworks curiously formed a set of books. This process was organic and unplanned. When the artworks that were physical became digital, then returned to a physical form, they were different from the original form. This transforming process could offer potential for new projects going forward. Instagram was the ideal tool to publish the work, being a visual medium. In his presentation 'History as decoration in the contemporary image', Vincent Larkin described Instagram as a visual forum for the decorative (2018: n. pag.). Publishing is instant. Little explanation is needed, enough just to present the work. It could be suggested that a single photograph is a difficult way for those working with the book form to communicate this intimate object successfully, and yet many have found it a useful tool, particularly for the dissemination of work. I have successfully used a set of images in a simple post that can be scrolled through left to right. Others take pleasure in the aesthetics of the book as a sculptural object when photographed, particularly when lighting is used well.

Figure 6: Julie Johnstone, Open Slowly, 2013. Digital print and card box. Courtesy of Eleanore Widger/Scottish Poetry Library.

A discussion of digital materiality goes much further in broader studies; however, some artists have begun to play with the form in their work related to books. In her conference paper 'The quiet democracy of the contemporary artist's book (or, why *do* artists make books?)', Bodman identifies a range of artists who do not use computers only as a tool to translate their work, or to distribute and market their work. Instead they are part of the creation of the book. In the Internet-based project 'The History Book That Never Was', artists were invited to upload a single page each; the collective book was then available as 'a free download gallery of works which could be assembled into a book' (Bodman 2008: 5). In this example the book was a collaborative exercise in design; however, ultimately it was the reader who became the editor, selecting and ordering the pages. In numerous examples artists have chosen to provide their book as a digital file available to download, an efficient way to send the book long distances and open up the widest audience possible. There is also a sense of a creative performance work here as the event happens in time.

The decorative form

Meaningless decoration has been criminal, or at least out of fashion, for a long time in visual communication. This was the subject of the Illustration Research conference where this paper was originally presented. With this in mind it seemed appropriate to consider a recent resurgence in a reader's engagement with the book form; adult colouring books have gained popularity and also linked to mindfulness practice. Many of the most popular colouring books are rooted in pattern and ornament (Figure 6). The most famous examples of recent colouring

books are illustrated by Johanna Bashford, inspired by the landscape of her childhood and family homes in Aberdeenshire and the forests of Arran. Text is limited and the focus is on the highly intricate imagery. According to Ian Scott at the NLS the colouring books are a popular contrast to digital applications,

The books are a chance to escape from our busy screen dominated lifestyles to an analogue world. All the images in the books are hand drawn by Bashford using ink and are not computer generated. It is though arguably the digital world of social media that is responsible for much of their success.

(Scott 2016: n.pag)

Figure 7: Eilidh Muldoon, The Colouring Book of Scotland, 2016. Digital print. Courtesy of Eilidh Muldoon.

There is an irony that published colouring books are held in the NLS under the Legal Deposit entitlement, and yet these copies will never be coloured in. Their function has been removed to protect the artefact. In the examples illustrated by Eilidh Muldoon, readers are taken on a geographical tour around Scotland. Landmarks are shown although again little text is supplied; instead the focus is on the ornamentation, often taken from the landscape itself and inviting the reader to spend some time here.

Some research is being undertaken relating the activity of colouring-in to a broader well-being discussion. Eleanor Ainge Roy considers, 'It is often suggested that colouring-in induces a mindful or meditative state and is linked to reduced activity in the amygdala or changes in brain-wave activity' (2017: n.pag.). Another area of interest is traditional bookbinding itself, particularly using exposed decorative stitching, where workshops seem to be appearing in abundance. It seems that the active process of making causes a physical response within the maker. Roy suggests, 'In this way, colouring-in could be considered an act of everyday little-c creativity, in much the same way as gardening or gourmet cooking'. Bookbinding is slow, repetitive and considered. It echoes colouring-in in many ways, at times requiring decision-making and concentration, and at others the maker can let their hands lead. Considering the audience, colouring books for adults also relate back to some of the earlier examples considered such as pop-up books that are not designed from children, but instead an appreciative adult audience.

In thinking about ornament as spiritual mediation, I am uncomfortable comparing mindful colouring books to religious books such as the Koran and the Bible, and yet there is possibly a similarity in that they offer a connection between the physical object and consciousness. All employ decoration and ornament within their form. The design is related to content; however, the decorative is dominant in each work, often using repetition and natural forms. This elaborate approach is in sharp contrast to the well-known theory of *form following function* associated with the Modernist movement, where unnecessary elements are stripped away. In a way we find ourselves back at the beginning – thinking about those beautiful adorned illuminated manuscripts of the Book of Kells and Fine Press.

Conclusion

Creators manipulate and transform the book to encapsulate the narrative. Even without a practical purpose, ornamentation can be employed to conjure a mood or setting, contributing to storytelling. Although an audience may not be conscious of the binding, scale, tactile sense of the materials, they will all be working purposefully to construct a narrative. Keith A. Smith is arguably the leading expert on bookbinding in the western world. In one of his numerous classic handbooks he describes his starting point for any project, 'When I think about bookbinding, I cannot determine *how to* without addressing, again and again, the question, *why?* *Why* must be answered before *how to* can become meaningful. *What* is needed will determine *how*' (Smith 1999: 27, original emphasis). This is at the core of the design brief. Understanding a concept is necessary to make the correct decisions. With both physical and digital books multiple senses can be employed. The tactile weight and touch of the paper matter. Smell comes from the ink and glue, or perfume added specific to the subject, as in scratch-and-sniff books. We hear a sound as the spine opens perhaps, or of the pages as they turn, even the gasp from the reader as a pop-up emerges or the click of a mouse. Visual senses are challenged in any visual artwork, but how about taste? It would be unpopular amongst librarians for a reader to lick a book housed in the great collections and it probably would not taste pleasant. Yet there is no reason a book designer could not design a work around this very concept.

In conclusion there is a strong argument for designers to go beyond the page when approaching a project. Both historical and contemporary works offer examples of three-dimensional narratives that creatively communicate with and challenge an audience. The title on this article reflects the starting point for the study, considering the whole form of the book as 'a thing to hold'. In a digital world a place remains for the physical artefact, and yet as our relationship with reading changes, opportunities for digital answers to the book are opening up.

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